

Walt Newman shares some memories

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I was stationed at Misamari, India....this was in Assam where there were a few airfields from which the ATC (Air Transport Command) operated. I was in the first batch to arrive - and in the last to leave. It was my job to burn the records. It was a reverse lend lease base...built by the British, with a very small British contingent of maintenance personnel - but then when we came in, it was brought up to American standards. I was not a pilot, nor part of the flying crew....I was the NCO in charge of Operations; although I did fly the hump as an "observer."

As I recall, the pilots hated the C-46's. When we arrived, we were a group of about 2,000...including flying and other staff. We had 20 (if I remember correctly) C-47's....(DC-3's). Elephants would load barrels of gas onto the planes and they would take off, over the hump, to various fields in China. Usually to Yunnann or Kunming. Then, several months after arriving, we got our first C-46, and eventually all the C-47's were replaced. I recall the pilots being unhappy with the C-46's because, whereas the 47 could fly with one engine, that was not the case with the C-46...they would go down, if one conked out. And since they flew over Burma, held by the Japanese - this was a real no-no. As I recall, we lost 90 crewmen during the time we were there. Further, again as I recall, the C-46 had the Curtiss electric propeller....and with various icing problems, plus the cargo of highly volatile gasoline in drums (leaking etc.) - they were very unhappy with this electrical function (sparks etc). They flew a part of the trip with oxygen masks; I recall one pilot in particular who had a mask made for his dog, which always accompanied him. He was one who was lost.

The British had an excellent system of getting intelligence throughout that entire region....and they paid natives and others for information about downed pilots. Quite often they managed to retrieve parachutes of downed crewmen....and thereby establishing identities. We had a large status board in the operations office...as the ship left (identified as Stork and the number), we noted it on the board and as it passed over several landmarks, would call in and we could trace its progress. when it arrived in China, we gave a sigh of relief. There were no beacons for them to follow. Over Burma was very dangerous as the Japanese had a patrol of planes flying north-south up to a point identified as Fort Hertz....our pilots, flying east-west were always alerted to stay north of Fort Hertz....but weather conditions often forced them to divert.

Of course I have many memories - and look back on those years with much affection for those with whom I lived for 2 years, and several friends who never returned. Incidentally, another base in Assam was Chabua...these were all close to the Bramaputra River - near the foothills of the Himalayas. When the Dali Lama escaped from Tibet, I understand he was put up temporarily at the old Misamari airfield. Assam is closed to visitors, and I heard from a local tea planter who I had befriended, that after we abandoned the airfield there (which was just one landing strip plus barracks and a small tower) - most of the structures were looted and taken down. Nothing more for now. Walt